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EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

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54 Stepper motor shaft position sensor.

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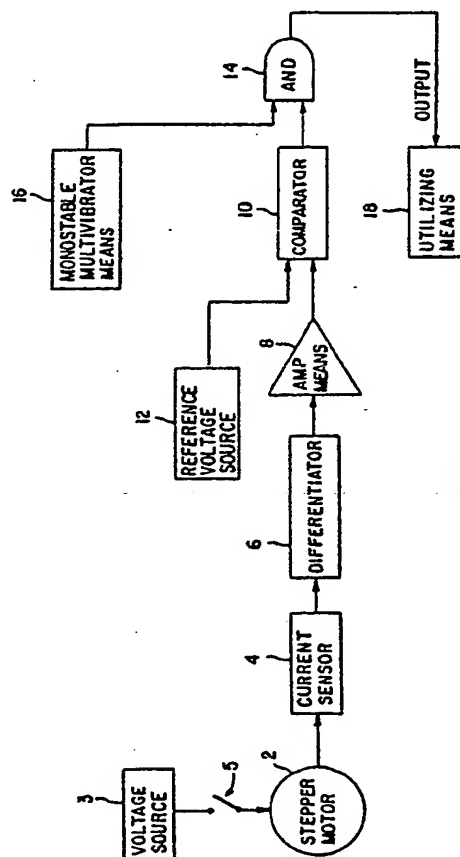


FIG. 1

EP 0 305 876 A2

STEPPER MOTOR SHAFT POSITION SENSOR

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A shaft position sensor as disclosed herein is typically used with a digitally controlled stepper motor which drives a hydraulic or pneumatic control valve, such as a butterfly valve, for controlling airflow in an aircraft cabin environmental control system. The sensor may also be used with a butterfly valve in an engine fuel control system, as the case may be.

The disclosed invention verifies whether or not the motor shaft has taken a step in response to a command input and provides information which may be fed back to a digital controller or the like to determine discrepancies between actual and commanded stepper motor shaft displacement. In this regard it will be appreciated that a single digital controller can monitor a multitude of such information for presentation on a single cathode ray tube (CRT) display to the pilot of the aircraft, and thereby provides a continuous verification of the motor shaft position. By way of comparison, analog systems for the purposes described typically generate a valve position feedback signal for display on a dedicated cockpit gauge.

Heretofore digital systems for sensing stepper motor shaft position have used optical decoders or the like mounted to the shaft of the stepper motor. This arrangement, with its additional hardware, increases the cost of the sensor, while decreasing its reliability.

The present invention senses displacement of a stepper motor shaft by sensing a particular signature of the motor current, i.e. the derivative of the current when the motor is excited. If the derivative of the current does not fall below a certain level during a certain time the motor shaft has not taken a step.

Prior art arrangements relating to sensors used in conjunction with motors of which the present inventor is aware are described in U.S. Patents 2,654,860; 3,267,346; 3,384,796; 4,422,040; 4,305,028; and 4,275,342. The inventor is also aware of U.K. Patent Specification 429,478 and Japanese Patent 59-35598.

U.S. Patent 2,654,860 issued to Lewis in 1953 senses a change in load for an AC motor as a function of motor current. The present invention senses movement of a stepper motor shaft using sensed motor current and hence is distinguished from the sensor of the patent.

U.S. Patent 3,267,346 issued to Liang, et al in 1966 uses an external sensor, i.e. a carrier means and a switch, to sense shaft position in order to

synchronize pulses applied to a sensor motor and is thus distinguished from the present invention.

U.S. Patent 3,384,796 issued to Shah in 1968 relates to a control arrangement for stopping a drive motor and uses a tachometer for sensing the rate of change of speed of the motor, and accordingly is also distinguished from the present invention.

U.S. Patent 4,422,040 issued to Raider, et al in 1983 relates to testing stepper motors, wherein the back EMF of the motor is compared to desired motor characteristics, and is hence not seen as directed to the present invention.

U.S. Patent 4,305,028 issued to Kostas, et al in 1981 relates to an arrangement for evaluating whether or not a robot can perform a series of programmed motions by comparing the velocity of the links of a robot simulator against predetermined velocity limits which will reproduce programmed steps. This patent is likewise not seen as directed to the present invention.

U.S. Patent 4,275,342 issued to Kwada, et al in 1981 relates to control apparatus for a DC motor wherein a tachometer output is sensed with motor voltage. If one occurs without the other an alarm is generated. This patent is also not seen as directed to the present invention.

U.K. Patent Specification 429,478 dated May, 1985, and in the name of CHF Muller Aktiengesellschaft relates to sensing movement of a rotor subjected to the stator field of an induction motor and is hence seen to be different than the present invention.

Japanese Patent 59-35598 dated February, 1984 and in the name of Fujitsu, et al relates to sensing the stepping of a pulse motor. The patent teaches determining whether or not the motor shaft has taken a step by looking at the motor current to see if the current reaches a particular level within a particular time. If this occurs, the motor shaft has not taken a step. The present invention is distinguished over the arrangement of the patent in that whether or not the motor has taken a step is determined by looking at the derivative of the motor current. This arrangement has distinct advantages over merely looking at the current as in the Japanese patent. For example, extraneous influences can easily affect the current waveform as observed in the Japanese patent, and thereby give a false or ambiguous indication as to whether or not the motor shaft has taken a step. This ambiguity is eliminated when the derivative of the current waveform is observed as in the present invention,

and hence a more accurate and reliable sensor is provided. Accordingly, the present invention is seen to distinguish over the teachings of the Japanese patent.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention contemplates a stepper motor shaft position sensor wherein the motor current provided upon excitation of the motor is differentiated. If the differentiated current falls below a predetermined value during a predetermined interval the motor shaft has taken a step and the sensor output is at a logic "high." If the differentiated current does not fall below the predetermined value during the predetermined interval the sensor output is at a logic "low" indicating that the stepper motor has not taken a step and the motor is in a stalled condition. The output of the sensor is applied to a utilizing means such as a controller or the like so that the position of the motor shaft is continuously verified.

Accordingly, there is disclosed and claimed herein a stepper motor shaft position sensor comprising means for sensing the current developed by the stepper motor when said motor is excited and for providing a motor current signal; means for differentiating the motor current signal and for providing a differentiated signal; means for providing a signal at a predetermined level; means for comparing the differentiated motor current signal and the signal at a predetermined level and for providing a comparison signal; means for providing a signal during a predetermined interval; means connected to the comparing means and the means for providing a signal during a predetermined interval and responsive to the comparison signal and the signal during the predetermined interval for providing an output signal, the output signal being at a first logic level when the motor shaft has taken a step and being at a second logic level when the motor shaft is stalled; and means connected to the means for providing the signals at the first and second logic levels for verifying the positions of the stepper motor shaft.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a block diagram generally illustrating the structural arrangement of the components of the invention.

Figure 2 is an electrical schematic diagram illustrating in substantial detail the components of the invention and the structural arrangement thereof.

Figure 3 is a graphical representation showing the motor current waveform when the stepper motor has taken a step.

Figure 4 is a graphical representation showing the motor current waveform when the stepper motor has not taken a step, i.e. is in a stalled position.

Figure 5 is a graphical representation showing the waveform of the derivative of the motor current having a waveform as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 6 is a graphical representation showing the waveform of the derivative of the motor current having a waveform as shown in Figure 4.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

With reference first to Figure 1, a stepper motor is designated by the numeral 2. A current sensor 4 is connected to stepper motor 2 and senses the current produced by an excitation voltage applied to stepper motor 2 by a voltage source 3 via a normally open switch 5. Sensor 4 provides a signal having a waveform as shown in Figures 3 or 4, depending on whether or not motor 2 has taken a step, as will hereinafter be further explained.

The signal from current sensor 4 is applied to a differentiator 6 and therefrom through an amplifier means 8 to a comparator 10. Differentiator 6 provides a signal having a waveform as shown in Figures 5 or 6, depending on whether or not motor 2 has taken a step as will hereinafter be further described.

Comparator 10 compares the signal from amplifier 8 to the signal from a reference voltage source 12 and provides a signal in accordance with said comparison which is applied to AND gate 14.

A monostable multivibrator means 16, commonly known as a "one-shot", provides a signal which is applied to AND gate 14. AND gate 14 is responsive to the signals from comparator 10 and one-shot 16 and provides an output signal which is applied to a utilizing means 18. Utilizing means 18 may be a digital controller or the like which drives a cathode ray tube (CRT) to present information to an observer such as a pilot of an aircraft indicating whether or not the shaft of stepper motor 2 has taken a step or is stalled, as the case may be. Thus, utilizing means 18 verifies the position of the stepper motor shaft as will now be understood.

With reference to Figure 2, current sensor 4 is essentially a resistor 20 having one leg connected to ground and the other leg connected to differentiator 6. Motor 2 includes a coil 2A having one leg connected intermediate the other leg of resistor 20 and differentiator 6. The other leg of motor coil 2A is connected to a terminal 5A of switch 5. It will be

noted that the voltage from voltage source 3 applied to motor coil 2A via switch 5 when the switch is closed as will be hereinafter described may be a command for stepping the shaft of motor 2, and sensor 4 provides a signal in response to said command.

Differentiator 6 includes an operational amplifier 22 having an inverting input terminal (-) and a non-inverting input terminal (+). Resistor 20 is connected to the non-inverting input terminal (+) of amplifier 22 and a grounded resistor 24 is connected to the inverting input terminal (-) of the amplifier. A resistor 26 is connected in feedback relation to an output terminal (O) of amplifier 22 and to a circuit point 28 intermediate resistor 24 and the inverting input terminal (-) of the amplifier.

Differentiator 6 further includes an operational amplifier 30 having a grounded non-inverting input terminal (+) and an inverting input terminal (-) connected to output terminal (O) of amplifier 22 through a capacitor 32 and a resistor 34 serially connected to capacitor 32. A feedback loop including a capacitor 36 connected in parallel with a resistor 38 is connected to an output terminal (O) of amplifier 30 and to the inverting input terminal (-) thereof.

Amplifier means 8 includes an operational amplifier 42 and is connected to differentiator 6 through a resistor 40 connected to the output terminal (O) of amplifier 30 and to an inverting input terminal (-) of amplifier 42. Amplifier 42 has a grounded non-inverting input terminal (+).

A resistor 44 is connected in feedback relation to an output terminal (O) of operational amplifier 42 and to the inverting input terminal (-) thereof.

Reference voltage source 12 includes an operational amplifier 46. An output terminal (O) of amplifier 46 is connected in feedback relation to the inverting input terminal (-) thereof. A potentiometer 59 includes a variable resistor 60 connected to the non-inverting input terminal (+) of amplifier 46. A resistor 64 connected to a positive (+) source of voltage is connected to one leg of resistor 60 and a resistor 66 connected to a negative (-) source of voltage is connected to the other leg of resistor 60. An output terminal (O) of amplifier 46 is connected to circuit point 52 through a resistor 68.

Comparator 10 includes an operational amplifier 48. The inverting input terminal (-) of operational amplifier 48 is connected through a resistor 50 to the output terminal (O) of amplifier 42 of amplifier means 8. The non-inverting input terminal (+) of amplifier 48 is connected to circuit point 52. A resistor 54 is connected in feedback relation to amplifier 48, having one leg connected to circuit point 52 and another leg connected to an output terminal (O) of amplifier 48. Said output terminal (O) of amplifier 48 is connected to a circuit point 70

which is connected to a resistor 72. Resistor 72 is connected to a positive (+) source of voltage. A conductor 74 leads from circuit point 70 to AND gate 14.

Monostable multivibrator means 16 includes an arrangement of dual monostable multivibrators or one-shots 76 and 78. One-shot 78 is driven by the pulses from a clock 79 and drives one-shot 76. The output from one-shot 76 is directed through a conductor 80 to AND gate 14.

AND gate 14 responds to the outputs thereto from amplifier 48 and from one-shot 76 through conductors 74 and 80, respectively, to provide a logic "high" output when the shaft of stepper motor 2 has taken a step and to provide a logic "low" output when the stepper motor shaft has not taken a step as when motor 2 is stalled, as will hereinafter be more fully described.

OPERATION OF THE INVENTION

The stepper motor shaft position sensor of the invention verifies the position of the shaft of stepper motor 2. This is achieved by observing the waveform of the motor current when the motor is excited by a voltage from voltage source 3.

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, the motor current generally increases with time in an inductance/resistance (L/R) relationship. If stepper motor 2 takes a step the current will dip to a level (i) at a time (t) as shown in Figure 3. If a step has not been taken the current rises in a smooth L/R curve as shown in Figure 4.

The current so provided is differentiated by differentiator 6. As shown in Figures 5 and 6, the differentiated current (di/dt) generally decreases with time. If the differentiated current falls below a predetermined level within a predetermined time as shown in Figure 5, AND gate 14 provides a logic "high" output indicating that the stepper motor shaft has taken a step. If the differentiated current does not fall below the predetermined level within the predetermined time and decreases smoothly with time as shown in Figure 6, the output of AND gate 14 will be a logic "low" indicating that the stepper motor shaft did not take a step, i.e. the motor is stalled. Utilizing means 18 responds to the logic "high" output or the logic "low" output, as the case may be, to verify the position of the stepper motor shaft.

AND gate 14 responds to the outputs of monostable multivibrator or one-shot means 16 and comparator 10 to provide the logic "high" or logic "low" outputs. Comparator 10 receives the output from differentiator 6 through amplifier means 8 and receives the output from potentiometer 59. Potentiometer 59 is adjustable to provide the predeter-

mined level which the differentiated current falls below to indicate that a step has been taken. Monostable multivibrator or one-shot means 16 is effective for providing a time "window" t_w (Figure 5) within which the differentiated current falls below the aforementioned predetermined level to indicate that said step has been taken.

In regard to monostable multivibrator or one-shot means 16, it will be understood that the monostable arrangement has one stable state and one quasi-stable state. The pulse output from clock 79 closes switch 5 via a relay 7 to apply the voltage from voltage source 3 to motor coil 2A. Simultaneously multivibrator 78 is triggered to induce a transition of multivibrator means 16 from the stable state to the quasi-stable state. The multivibrator means remains in the quasi-stable state for a predetermined interval and eventually will revert to its stable state without an external signal being required to include the reversion. The interval during which the multivibrator means remains in its quasi-stable state is the interval during which the differentiated current must fall to the predetermined level, which is indicative that the shaft of motor 2 has taken a step within the required time window t_w (Figure 5).

In summary, the invention senses a particular signature of the stepper motor current when the stepper motor is excited. The signature is provided when the current is differentiated. If the differentiated current falls below a predetermined level as determined by potentiometer 59 within a predetermined interval as determined by monostable multivibrator means 16 a step has been taken by the stepper motor shaft and the sensor provides a logic output indicative of same. If the differentiated current does not fall below the aforementioned predetermined value during the aforementioned predetermined interval the sensor output is at another logic level indicating that the sensor motor shaft did not take a step and the motor is in a stalled condition.

With the above description of the invention in mind reference is made to the claims appended hereto for a definition of the scope of the invention.

Claims

1. With a stepper motor of the type which is energized by a motor shaft step command signal to provide a motor current, and including means for sensing the motor current to determine if the motor shaft has taken a step in response to the step command signal, the improvement comprising:
means for differentiating the sensed motor current and for providing a differentiated signal;
means for providing a reference signal at a predetermined level;

means for providing a signal during a predetermined interval;

means for comparing the differentiated signal and the reference signal at the predetermined level and for providing a comparison signal; and

means connected to the comparing means and to the predetermined interval signal means and responsive to the signals therefrom for providing a signal indicative of the step status of the motor shaft.

2. The improvement as described by claim 25, including:

means connected to the means for providing a signal indicative of the step status of the motor shaft for verifying the position of the motor shaft.

3. The improvement as described by claim 25, wherein the means connected to the comparing means and to the predetermined interval signal means and responsive to the signals therefrom for providing a signal indicative of the step status of the motor shaft includes:

means for providing the signal indicative of the step status of the motor at a first logic level when the motor shaft has taken a step and at a second logic level when the motor shaft is stalled.

4. The improvement as described by claim 27, wherein:

the first logic level is a logic "high" and the second logic level is a logic "low".

5. The improvement as described by claim 28, wherein:

the signal indicative of the step status of the motor is at the logic "high" when the differentiated signal falls below the predetermined level during the predetermined interval, with said input signal otherwise being at the logic "low".

6. The improvement as described by claim 25, wherein the means for differentiating the sensed motor current and for providing a differentiated signal includes:

a first operational amplifier connected to the means for sensing the motor current; and a second operational amplifier connected to the first operational amplifier and providing the differentiated signal

7. The improvement as described by claim 30, including:

operational amplifier means connected to the second operational amplifier.

8. The improvement as described by claim 31, wherein the means for providing a reference signal at a predetermined level includes:

a variable resistor having one leg connected to a voltage source of one polarity and another leg connected to a voltage source of an opposite polarity.

9. The improvement as described by claim 32, wherein the comparing means includes:
an operational amplifier connected to the variable resistor and connected to the operational amplifier means.

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10. The improvement as described by claim 25, wherein the means for providing a signal during a predeterminal interval includes:

a first monostable multivibrator;

a clock for providing driving pulses;

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the first monostable multivibrator connected to the clock and driven by the pulses therefrom; and

a second monostable multivibrator connected to the first monostable multivibrator and driven thereby for providing the signal during the predetermined interval.

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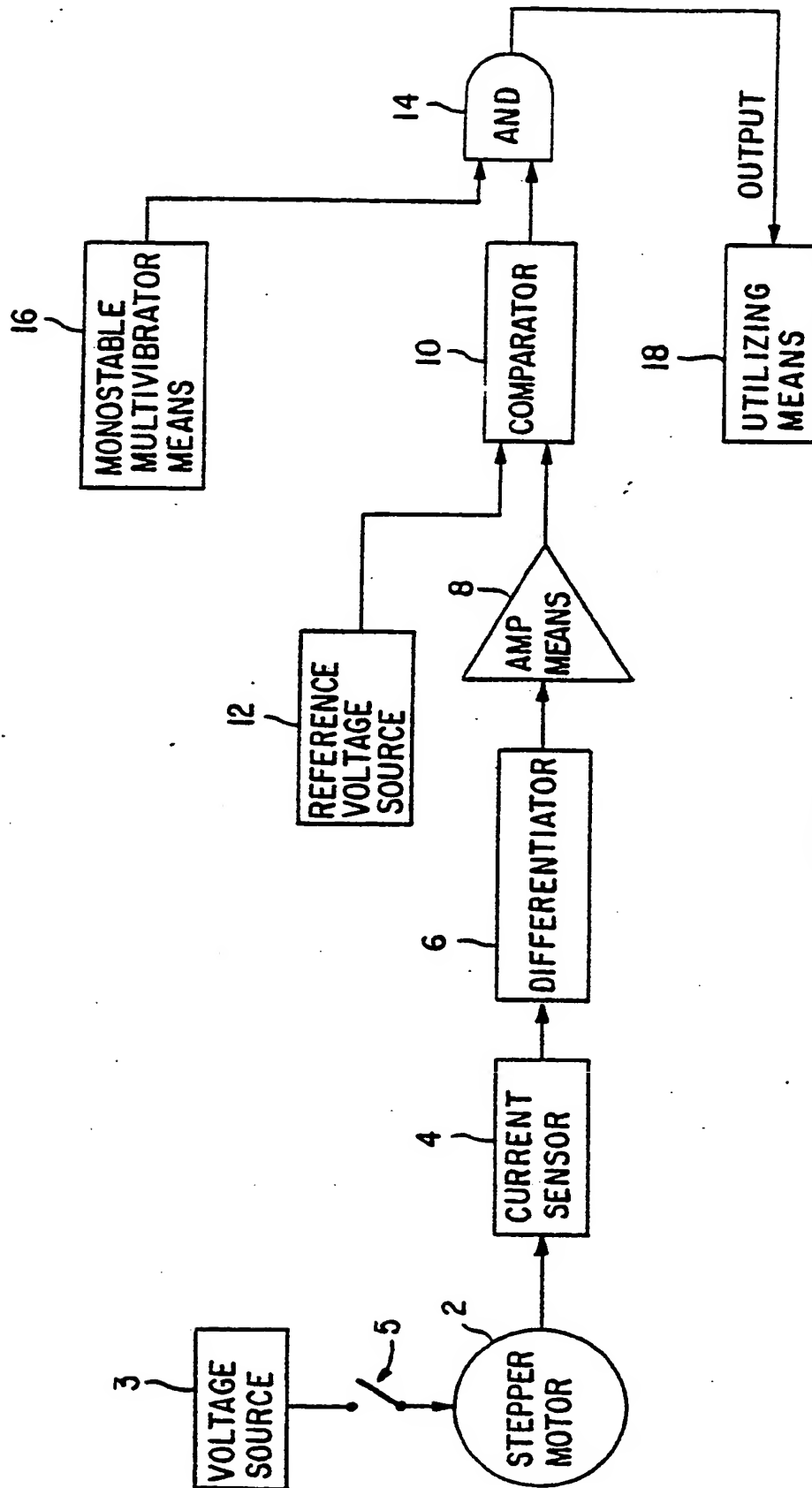


FIG. 1

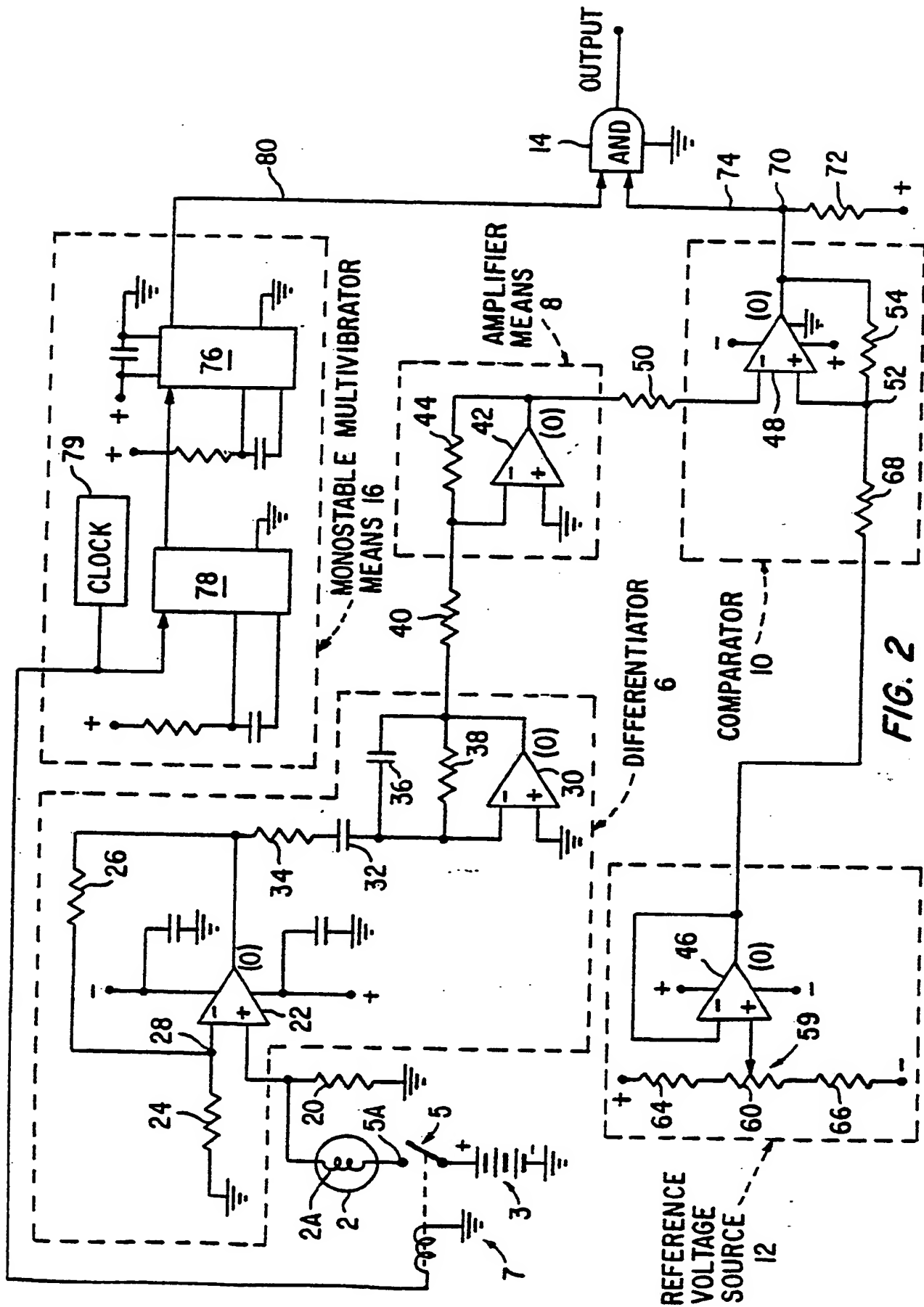
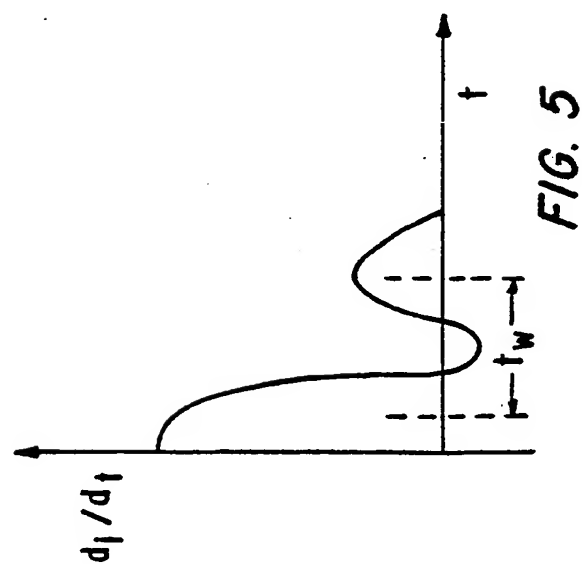
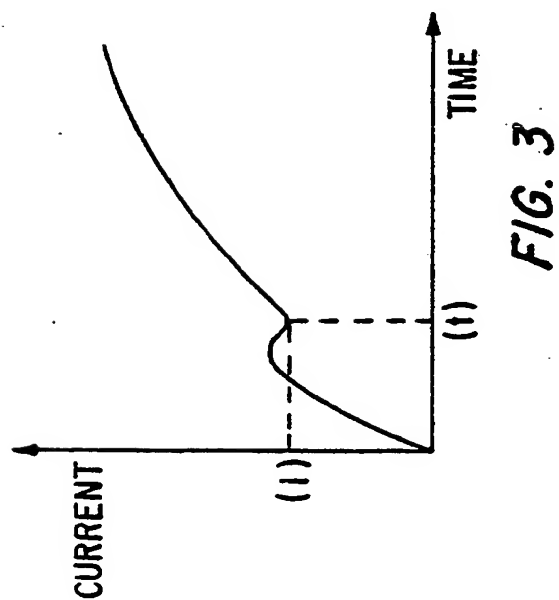
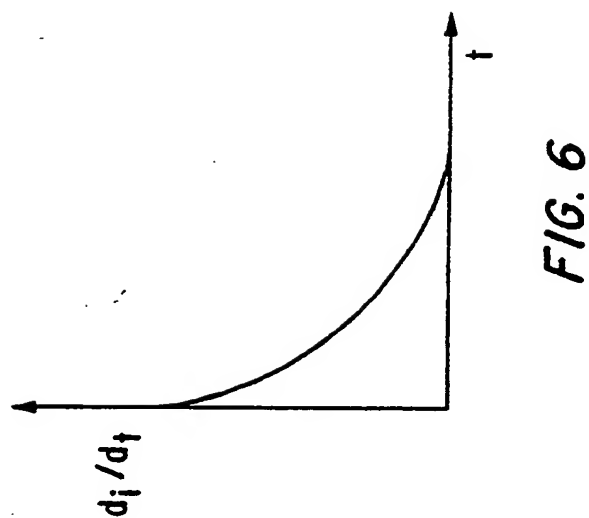
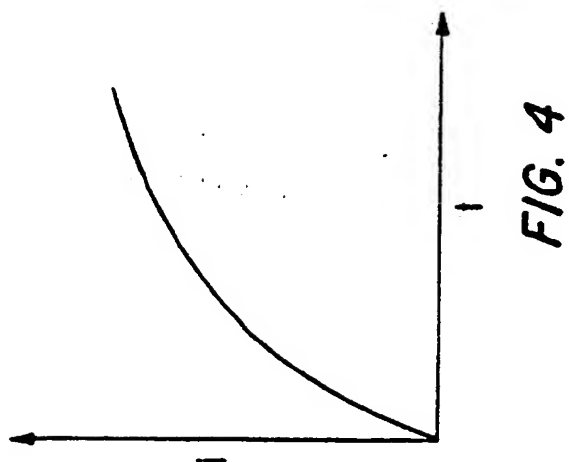


FIG. 2



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54 **Stepper motor shaft position sensor.**

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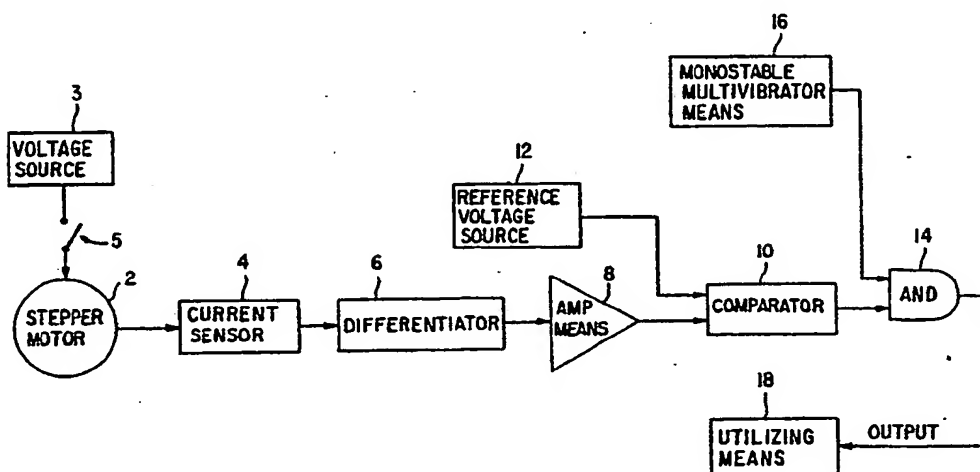


FIG. 1



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PARTIAL EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
which under Rule 45 of the European Patent Convention
shall be considered, for the purposes of subsequent
proceedings, as the European search report

Application number

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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. 4)
A	DE - B - 2 944 872 (GEBRÜDER JUNGHANS) * column 7, line 18 - column 9, line 17; figures 2,3 *	1	H02P8/00
A	EP - A - 0 137 093 (ASULAB S.A.) * figures 6,7 *	1	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl. 4)
			H02P8/00 G04C3/00 H02H7/00
INCOMPLETE SEARCH			
<p>The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the provisions of the European Patent Convention to such an extent that it is not possible to carry out a meaningful search into the state of the art on the basis of some of the claims.</p> <p>Claims searched completely: 1</p> <p>Claims searched incompletely:</p> <p>Claims not searched: 2-10</p> <p>Reason for the limitation of the search: claims 2-10 dependant on claims 25, 27,28,30,31,32 not filed</p>			
Place of search BERLIN		Date of completion of the search 12-02-1990	Examiner M. LEOUFFRE
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